

JSC UNITES

Center employees react to the national tragedy with compassion

By Melissa Davis

Disbelief. Fear. Sadness.

The people of Johnson Space Center were deeply affected by the tragic events in New York City and Washington, D.C. on Sept. 11, 2001.

Despite the pain, JSC employees rose above their grief. Just as Center management worked diligently to provide security and safety for employees, JSC staff members were equally fervent in showing their patriotism and support for those devastated by the incidents.

Each life at JSC was touched by the tragedy, regardless if a loved one was lost in the attacks. Here is a small snapshot of how JSC employees and associates reacted to the events.

Finding the right words

By signing several large banners, the JSC family shared its message of support and camaraderie for the survivors, rescuers and those related to victims in New York and Washington, D.C. The banners were then posted at sites along the JSC campus perimeter.

“We have had a tremendous response, exceeding my expectation,” said Nicole Cloutier of the Public Affair Office. Cloutier helped organize the Friday, Sept. 14, project.

Cloutier said she was touched by how empathetic people were as they signed the banners.

“They aren’t simply just walking in, signing their name and walking out. They are coming in, very solemn, almost as if in a memorial service itself or at a memorial site,” Cloutier said as people signed the banners. “They are quietly reading other inscriptions, walking the length of the banners (36 feet) and reviewing the names and messages. It’s just really neat to see.”

So many emotions

Jackie Reese, a JSC EAP counselor, said the tragedy has touched JSC staff members deeply.

“People are expressing sadness at the loss of security and sense of safety that this brings, and some apprehension about whether or not the attacks are over,” she said. “Most folks are very angry, and are struggling to be patient while the perpetrators and consequences are determined.”

In addition to the sadness, apprehension and anger, Reese said people are indeed empathetic, as Cloutier noted.

“Folks also have a great deal of compassion for the victims, survivors, rescuers and family members impacted,” she said.

On top of all of those emotions, Reese said she believes parents are struggling most with the knowing what to tell their children – how to be honest yet reassuring. Reese herself has struggled with that problem.



NASA JSC 2001e26828 Photo by David DeHoyos

On Friday, Sept. 14, a group of JSC employees gathered for an hour-long prayer vigil at the base of the flagpole in front of Building 1. People, like the man above, showed their patriotism.

“At dinner on Tuesday (Sept. 11), my 9-year-old daughter asked me what would happen to us if we lost the war. I wasn’t prepared for that question,” Reese said. “I ended up telling her that at the very least we would live under very different rules. It was the only thing I could think of that was honest but not terrifying.”

In spite of all the problems, Reese said a positive has risen from the negatives.

“People recognize this as an opportunity to become closer and stronger as a nation, and to not allow ourselves to become complacent,” she said.

Expressions of support

One JSC staffer motivated by such patriotism is Beatriz Serrato, a LAN/WAN Manager for Lockheed Martin.

A woman of faith, Serrato felt compelled to approach PAO about leading a small tribute in the Building 3 cafeteria. After given permission, she presented her

tribute during lunchtime to recognize “our fallen brothers and sisters” on Friday, Sept. 14. President George W. Bush designated that date as a “National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the Victims of the Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001.”

She put together a short PowerPoint tribute and sang *God Bless America*, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, the complete *Star Spangled Banner* and *Amazing Grace*. The title page included scripture from Proverbs.

“I mean, where else but in this country can we have freedom as the kind we have over here? How dare anyone come in and attempt to try to shake us? We have seen over and over again how this has been attempted in the past,” she said. “...we have dealt with the likes of Hitler and still we prevailed.”

At the end, she closed with a prayer. In it she said, “Please bless us in our hour of need. Bless your fallen children who we

call brother and sister. Bless this country, for it is precious and it is pure....We pray that a quick resolution comes with this and that we can thwart any and all acts of aggression that are launched against this our soil. We will protect it with our very lives, because we are Americans.”

Near, yet so far

Franco Fenoglio understands the pride of Americans, even though he is Italian and lives in his native country.

Fenoglio worked at JSC from November 1997 to April 1999. He is an employee of Alenia, an Italian aerospace company that is part of the European Space Agency team supporting the X-38. His company had sent him here to participate in the engineering for the environment control for the X-38 cabin.

On Sept. 11 his heart was back to America and his thoughts were with his former co-workers at JSC. When the tragedy struck, Fenoglio sent an e-mail to his friends back here.

“First of all, please let me express my participation to the pain that I can only imagine every American people is experiencing in these days,” he wrote. “I can ensure that, even if we are so far from America, there are sincere feelings of sadness and the real wish to cooperate with your country – to bring back the Earth to be a place where our children can grow in peace and with the hope their future will shine again.”

And in his concern, his thoughts turned toward the space program and how it can be used as a positive symbol in a world reeling from terrorism.

“And, even if a drop in the ocean, the continuation and completion of our ISS could be a message to the entire world that people can work together for a common objective aimed to improve human knowledge and life in a peaceful way,” he wrote.

A view from above

During the attacks, the ISS was indeed a symbol of unity. During the events, it was safe in the hands of Mission Control. Still, the Expedition Three crew mourned the day’s events, despite their distance from JSC and the rest of the world.

After the attack, Commander Frank Culbertson, Pilot Vladimir Dezhurov and Flight Engineer Mikhail Tyurin were able to fly over New York City at an altitude of approximately 250 miles to get a look at the city from their unique position.

Upon seeing the devastation, Culbertson was taken back by the sight. However, he was still able to offer inspiring words of encouragement for all Americans.

“I know it is very difficult for everybody in America right now, I know folks are struggling to deal with this and recover from this,” he said. “I want the folks to know that our country still looks good, and for New York to know that their city still looks beautiful from space.” ■